

**Regional Program: West Africa****Counseling, Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration of Victims of Torture**

**Implementing Partners:** International Rescue Committee (IRC), Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), and Search for Common Ground (SFCG)

**Funding Period:** March 2003 – February 2004

**Amount:** \$750,000

**Purpose:** Using a cross-border approach and in collaboration with national and sub-regional social organizations, facilitate the return and rehabilitation of refugees and improve access to information.

**Objectives**

- Strengthen local facilities and services in the psycho-social, legal, medical, and protection sectors to ensure they can respond to and prevent incidents of gender violence.
- Provide direct mental health services for traumatized individuals and increase the capacities of local mental health infrastructures.
- Promote non-violent conflict resolution and social reintegration of returnees among communities living in the cross-border area of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.

**Accomplishments**

- Project participants in the far-eastern district of Kailahun (bordering Guinea and Liberia) received basic information, psychosocial counseling, trauma rehabilitation, legal advice, and training in communication skills.
- Four local support groups have been formed and equipped to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. Some 23 psychosocial agents have also been trained to rehabilitate traumatized persons.
- As of September 2003, 52 human rights infringements including rape, attempted rape, forced early marriage, domestic violence and harmful traditional practices were reported to the staff of the IRC through the police, United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), traditional authorities, and community volunteers. Survivors of such attacks received instant counseling, referrals, and support that enhanced their rehabilitation and social reintegration into their communities.
- CVT has identified and serviced over 200 clients in four project sites. The clients had been tortured or raped during the crisis and face mental health challenges including trauma, grief, loss, depression, physical constraint caused by amputations and disabilities, as well as recurring family problems, including domestic violence and child abuse incidents.

- The USAID-sponsored community radio station was completed, and Radio Moa was launched. The radio station is supporting the efforts of the consortium by promoting peace, stability, and the respect of human rights. Through local language programming, the radio station will provide accurate information that will ultimately facilitate the social reintegration of returnees and encourage peace-building dialogue in cross-border communities.

The conflict in the Mano River basin arises from political instability in the three-border area of Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia as it grapples with problems associated with continued armed conflict and post-conflict transition. The enduring regional conflict has disintegrated communities, destroyed infrastructures, stalled economies, and forced massive displacement of families internally and across borders. While the recent end of armed hostilities in Sierra Leone is an important step toward achieving harmony in the region, this fragile peace is currently challenged by the resurgence of violence in neighboring Liberia.

In collaboration with other USAID bilateral programs in the sub-region, the VTF-funded project responds to the urgent needs of refugees returning to Sierra Leone from Guinea and Liberia. In particular, this project focuses attention on treating refugees who have suffered from trauma associated with forced abduction, torture, maiming, and sexual abuse. The program seeks to provide accurate information that will ultimately facilitate the social reintegration of returnees and encourage peace-building dialogue in cross-border communities.